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Fiat Lux: A Modern
Mystery Play in One Act:
by Faith Van Valken-
burgh Vilas

Samuel French: Publisher
25 West Forty-fifth Street, New York

LONDON

Samuel French: Ltd.

26 SOUTHAMPTON STREET, STRAND

PRICE THIRTY-FIVE CENTS

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SAVUE. FRENCH, Publisher, 25 West 45th Street.

"FIAT LUX"

(Let There Be Light)

A MODERN MYSTERY PLAY

IN ONE ACT

By

FAITH VAN VALKENBURGH VILAS

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GREENWICH VILLAGE THEATRE

Wednesday Afternoon, Dec. 28th, at 3 o'clock

THE INTER THEATRE ARTS, INC.

Presents

" F I A T L U X "

A Modern Mystery Play by

FAITH VAN VALKENBURGH VILAS

CAST

AZARIAH.....James W. Wallace
FATHER AMBROSE.....Hobart Upjohn
NELLIE.....Elsie Connor
SOLDIER.....Watson Lee
THE WAITS.....Ascension Junior Choir

SCENE: Living room of AZARIAH's house on
Christmas Eve.

TIME: Christmas Eve.

“FIAT LUX”

(Let There Be Light)

SCENE: *The interior of a humble one-room cottage on a mountainside. A fire burns in open fireplace L. Center stage a practical door. At L. C. and R. C., windows rimmed with snow. Another door L. Deal table and chairs R. Oval portrait of a woman over fireplace; on mantel shelf two empty candle-sticks. Teapot on low settle by fire.*

At rise of curtain the distant chiming of church bells is heard across the snow. AZARIAH, old, embittered and lonely, enters from inner room at the right, placing logs which he carries on the fire.

AZARIAH

Fools, fools, fools!

With their prayers and their incense and their
God.

If I could

I would silence their loud mouthed bells forever.

(He goes to window R. and looks out)

Candles burning at all the windows in the
valley.

Two windows shall be dark tonight— .

Mine—

(Sound of chimes again)

Curse those bells! Curse them, curse them!

(He sinks into chair by fire and sits moodily,

his hands working nervously. A step is heard crunching through the snow. Then a knock, stamping of snow from feet. AZARIAH looks up, but makes no move. Another knock, silence.)

AMBROSE

(From without)
It is Father Ambrose.
Will you not let me in?

AZARIAH

(Still seated)
What do you want of me?

AMBROSE

A little warmth,
And just a word or two.

AZARIAH

I do not care for words with anyone tonight.
Nor have I any warmth to spare.

AMBROSE

Then let me in for old times' sake.
For the days when we were boys together.

AZARIAH

(Going slowly to door and opening it)
I know what it is you want of me.



"FIAT LUX"

See page 4

But I can tell you frankly
It is of no avail, your visit here tonight.
No words of yours can change me,
(*Cynically*)
Father Ambrose.

(FATHER AMBROSE *has come in carrying a lighted lantern, which he places on table. He is a benign man in the habit of religion. He lifts his hand to make the sign of the cross.*)

AMBROSE

God be with you.

AZARIAH

(*Striking down lifted hand*)
No.
Do not call for the blessing of your God
Upon this house.

AMBROSE

Though you deny Him, oh my brother,
Still is He near you.

AZARIAH

Not here,
Nor anywhere.
(*Solemnly*)
There is no God.

AMBROSE

(*Rubbing his cold hands before the fire and drawing up a chair.*)

Still so embittered.
How I hoped the days
As they lessened your first sorrow
Would bring a healing to your stricken heart.
Would bring back to your eyes
Whose perfect vision the tears have blurred
The power once more to see the beauty of His
handiwork,
To feel again the comfort of His sympathy.
Your old belief is only stunned by sorrow,
brother;
It will some day awaken.

AZARIAH

(Stands looking cynically at AMBROSE)
You, a man of reason,
You who should be so wise, so wise,
Do you still truly believe in a divinity?
In an Almighty Father?

AMBROSE

I have never doubted.

AZARIAH

You who well know how grimly
Brother slaughtered brother,
Staining the earth with innocent young blood.
You who watched our boys march by in pride
and strength
Never to return.
You who have heard the enemy's shout of
triumph,
And seen the women and children starved to
death

Or saved for a fate that would make death a
 benison,
You who know all the unspeakable side of war,
Can you still think there is a Father in Heaven?
Would you or I

(Lashing himself into fury)

I say, would you or I
Treat our own children so?
If there *is* a God in Heaven
His heart is made of stone,
But I prefer
To think there is no God.

AMBROSE

(Gently)

I know how deeply you have suffered.
I know that one by one
Your dearest have been taken.
But still I reckon as your greatest loss
The loss of your belief.

AZARIAH

I once believed, it's true.
I paid my toll in prayers and in devotion.
On every Christmas eve the candles burned as
 brightly
In my poor mountain windows
As any that send out their glow from valley
 homes tonight.
The Christmas waits were welcome,
And they sang to open hearts before my
 friendly fire.
But now
I do not wish
Ever to hear their hymns of praise again.

AMBROSE

I cannot bring you back your dead,
But I must try to bring you back your faith.

AZARIAH

My dead,
My dead.

*(Steps close to fire-place, leaning his head on
his hands, his shoulders convulsed. Then
looking up)*

Oh Mary,
If you could come back to tell me it is true,
That God exists out where you are.
That He has pity,
That He has compassion.
But no, you cannot come to me.
You cannot come.

AMBROSE

There are worse things than death, my friend.

AZARIAH

Yes,
Suffering,
It is worse.

The little daughter Mary left behind soon
taught me that.
Her poor frail body, warped and twisted.
Her face, her soul of angel beauty.
Patient and sweet she always was,
But how she suffered,
And I with her.

It was *then* I doubted first.
Not after Mary left perhaps,
But then, then,
What Heavenly Father,
What divine love,
Could inflict such agony upon such innocence?
When I sat here
And listened to her little crutch tap-tapping on
the floor,
Each tap of it
Sank deeper in my aching heart,
And I would long to cry aloud,
"There is no heavenly compassion."
And when she died
I spoke the bitter words at last.

AMBROSE

I know how you have suffered, friend, I know.

AZARIAH

How can *you* know
Who have no ties of blood?

AMBROSE

And still I know
And long to ease your pain.

AZARIAH

No son of yours was shot down in all his
strength and beauty.
You cannot know the grief I felt

When word came back to me of David's—
going.

AMBROSE

(Moved)

He was a good—brave boy.

AZARIAH

Yes,

He was brave.

Among the first to answer.

And he marched forth in the fresh bloom of
manhood

Only to fall broken and crushed and bleeding.

And you still can talk to me of a divine and
pitying father.

It is all lies—and lies—and lies.

AMBROSE

I know that you have walked the path of
sorrow.

Alone you stumble down the darkened way

Bruising your tired feet.

I offer you a light, my friend;

I feel you are more lonely than you need to be.

I want to stand beside you.

But I did not mean tonight to reawaken grief,

To speak to you of death,

Rather have I come to ask help for the living.

AZARIAH

What help?

AMBROSE

It is a simple thing I ask.
You know of the time honored custom in our
valley,
That from each window a bright star of candle-
light
Shall make a pathway in the snow
On this the eve of the Nativity.
Will you not light your windows?

AZARIAH

After all that I have said
You still can ask me that?

AMBROSE

Your little cottage stands alone
And high above the valley with its twinkling
lights.
The candles in your windows here would guide
the waits
Who pass tonight across the hill
To sing in the new settlement upon the ridge.
Surely for humanity
If not for any dearer sake,
You'll light these candles?
(*Draws two from his pocket*)
They are of my own dipping.
(*AZARIAH refuses them, shaking his head,*
and AMBROSE places them on the table.)

AZARIAH

(*Pushing them from him*)
No light

Shall glow from out my house tonight.

AMBROSE

Yours will be the only darkened panes in all
the countryside.

AZARIAH

Let them be dark,
For in my soul
There is not any light at all.

AMBROSE

The waits may not come in to warm them-
selves?
Yours is the last house
And the wind is chill.

AZARIAH

Neither the waits,
Nor you,
Nor yet your great Jehovah
(*Cue for carolling*)
Are welcome here tonight.
Unless——

AMBROSE

Unless?

AMBROSE

Unless He sends my children back

To tell me that their anguish
Has not been in vain.

AMBROSE

Alas the dead do not return.
And yet to the Almighty all is possible.
(*Voices of waits are heard in the distance
carolling. They grow louder. AMBROSE
moves to door, picking up his lantern.
AZARIAH turns his back and looks into
fire.*)
Will you not let them in?

AZARIAH

They may not enter here.

AMBROSE

My heart bleeds for you, oh my brother.
(*He opens the door, stands in it a moment
making the sign of the cross.*)
May God bring you the light.
(*Exit*)

AZARIAH

(*Turning in anger*)
There is no God.
And there shall be no light.

(*Goes to the fire, tries to extinguish it with his
foot. Voices grow fainter as the waits go
over the mountain. AZARIAH sits brood-
ing by the darkened hearth, where only a*

feeble glow remains. A noise is heard of someone stumbling on the door-step. A hand fumbles with the latch, and a gentle voice speaks.)

LAME GIRL

Oh let me in,
Please let me in.

(AZARIAH listens, gets up, peers out of window
C. Voice as before, repeats. He opens door and the LAME GIRL enters, moving with pain and difficulty. She is dressed in a light, straight gown covered by a mantel. She glows with an unearthly light. She sinks into chair by the fire and speaks pantingly in a sweet, clear voice.)

LAME GIRL

I am so lame.
And they walked oh! so fast.
My one poor crutch caught in the snow and
broke to bits,
And now I am afraid I shall not find my friends
again.
And I so long to join in their glad songs to-
night.

AZARIAH

You too are lame,
Do you then suffer much?

LAME GIRL

Oh yes, but I try to forget,
And tonight I quite forgot even my lameness.

It is so beautiful and serene out there in the
open,
God's stars seem quite, quite close at hand.
It is almost as light as day.
It was only here among your dark trees that I
lost my way.
It is all hushed
And waiting,
Just as it must have been on that night so long
ago
When the kings
Journeyed to the manger.

AZARIAH

You are lame and you suffer cruelly,
Even as my little daughter suffered,
But still you think there is a God?

LAME GIRL

It is because I suffer
That I *know* there is a God.

AZARIAH

How can that be?

LAME GIRL

I think a person who has never suffered
Has not truly lived.
It is through suffering that we learn of the
most lovely things in life.
We learn the warmth of pity,
The touch of tender ministering fingers,

And above all,
We learn of selflessness.

AZARIAH

To suffer
Is to die a thousand deaths.

LAME GIRL

Only to be born anew each time.

AZARIAH

Suffering mars and sears,
It draws deep furrows on the face.

LAME GIRL

But how beautiful and how strong it is,
The face that has accepted sorrow bravely.
A face unlined
Is like a blank unwritten page.

AZARIAH

You can believe then
In a God
Who wilfully inflicts such suffering upon the
innocent?

LAME GIRL

God our Father sends us suffering it is true,
Suffering is our teacher.
If you had a little child would you not wish it
wise?

Though the task was difficult the teacher set,
You would look only to the future,
To the time when, the schooling over,
Your child would come into its own through
knowledge.

So it is with our Father in Heaven.
He makes our souls grow wise and strong
Through suffering—
Wise and strong,
And oh so full of understanding pity.

AZARIAH

He makes our souls grow strong through suffer-
ing.
Oh if I only dared believe it.

LAME GIRL

Ah but you *must* believe.
For it is true,
My life has proven it.
(*She rises, holding onto the chair*)
But now that I am rested I must go.
(*Looks out through window*)
How shall I find my way?
Your trees are shadowy,
I cannot see the path.

(AZARIAH *sits dazed thinking of what she
has said. She reaches her arms out to him
with a gesture of affection, which he does
not see. Then noticing the candles on the
table and the candle-sticks on the mantle*)
May I not light this candle
And put it in the window by the door?
(*She does so*)

Now I can see the path quite well
And it will guide me on my way into the open.

AZARIAH

(Rousing and going to her)
You are so like my little girl,
In stature and in voice,
Your lameness is so like,
It makes a bond between us.
You say you broke your crutch;
Wait. *(He goes to the fireside and takes a crutch lovingly in his arms, speaking with great emotion. Hands it to her. She withdraws a bit from him. She is supernatural, but he does not realize it)*
Here take this,
It was my little daughter's crutch.
If you can use it you are welcome.

LAME GIRL

(Taking crutch and putting it under her arm)
It is just right.
Oh now how quickly I shall find my friends again.
God bless you, and good-night.
(Exit)

(AZARIAH stands at the open door watching her, closes the door, goes to the window. Shading his eyes from the candle, he peers out into the night. Then slowly comes back to the fire and sits.)

AZARIAH

He makes our souls grow strong



"FIAT LUX"

See page 18

Through suffering.

(One approaches whistling a tune, "Long, Long Trail," gaily, steps on porch; a knock is heard)

Well.

(Pause; another knock)

What is it?

SOLDIER

(From without)

A bit of warmth and a light.

AZARIAH

(Going slowly to door and opening it)

Come in.

SOLDIER

(Enters stamping and shaking snow from his uniform. There is an ominous but old stain over his left breast)

I'm on my way to join the carolling.

I've not been back

Since—

Since the war.

I am not quite as strong as I had hoped.

See *(pointing to wound)* this is my difficulty.

I lost my way out there among your trees,

And stumbled,

And my croix-de-guerre fell in the deep snow.

If I may catch my breath and have a light

No doubt I shall soon find it

And go on across the hill.

(Warming his hands before fire)

I am so loath to miss the carolling tonight.

AZARIAH

You wish to join the carolling,

You who have come from war?

SOLDIER

That's just the reason why
I long to sing tonight.
I learned the dear companionship of song
Out there.

AZARIAH

Do you believe in God?

SOLDIER

Of course.

AZARIAH

You can believe?
You whose own eyes have seen the horrors
And the wreck of war?
You who have seen the men about you slain
And all for nothing?

SOLDIER

Oh don't say that my friend.
It was not all for nothing.

AZARIAH

Our young men slain by thousands,
And no victory.

SOLDIER

Well, after all, the victory meant little.
What did mean much

Was how each one faced death.
I used to think that God was nearer us
Out on the battlefield
Than in our quiet church at home.

AZARIAH

How can He be
Where brother slaughters brother,
Where mothers' sons are slain by mothers'
sons?
Where enemies can triumph?

SOLDIER

We learn out there our Heavenly Father has
no enemies,
Nor does He ever side with anyone.
He is a friend of all,
The humble and the mighty,
And in the midst of battle He is there to help
us meet death bravely.
It counts with Him, oh! not at all,
When or how young we die;
Whether the victor or the vanquished.
But it does count with Him
How we meet death.
And He is there beside us
To help us meet it bravely.
With head erect—
Singing—
We march into the Valley of Shadows.

AZARIAH

He has no enemies, you say?

FIAT LUX

SOLDIER

None.

We are all His children.

Sometimes we too forgot that we had enemies.

Why I remember when this wound was new

And I had fallen on the battlefield,

Beside me lay a soldier—

You would perhaps have called him enemy—

Wounded he was,

A mortal wound I think.

He offered me his flask with its last drop of
water.

“Drink it,” he whispered, “for I may live until
they come,

“But you alas are dying.”

But let us talk no more of war,

For I forget that time is passing,

And I will be too late to lift my voice in praise
tonight.

(Goes towards lighted candle)

May I not put this candle in the other window?

AZARIAH

No, do not touch it.

It is to guide a lame girl.

Take this one.

*(He takes the candle and places it in the
candle-stick on mantel and lights it; hands
it to SOLDIER who stands with it in his
hands so that the light falls across his face
as he speaks.)*

SOLDIER

God bless you friend,

And bear this thing in mind:



"FIAT LUX"

See page 22

God cares not when we go or how
If we go bravely.

(Puts candle in the other window, opens the door)

Thank you, and good-night.
(Exit)

AZARIAH

Good-night.

(Follows to the door, reaches out his hand to take SOLDIER'S hands, but latter withdraws from contact; he is supernatural. AZARIAH stands leaning against open door.)

God cares not when we go nor how
If we go bravely.
Oh he was brave, my David.
I know that he went—
Singing.

SOLDIER

(Calls from distance)
I've found the cross, thank you,
And once more, good-night.

AZARIAH

Good-night.

(Walks slowly towards the fire)
Strange, strange,
I feel a sudden glow within my heart.
My lighted windows first
And now my heart's alight.

(Carolling is heard in the distance. It comes nearer. AZARIAH finally hears it, jumps to his feet, puts on another log at the fire.)

More light.

More light and warmth!

(Goes to door, throws it open wide and calls)

Come in,

Come in to light and warmth.

(AMBROSE and the WAITS enter, AMBROSE looking curiously at the changed AZARIAH.

The WAITS gather about the fire warming their hands. AZARIAH looks at WAITS and goes to door and looks out. Turning)

AZARIAH

Where are the little lame girl and the soldier?

AMBROSE

What lame girl and what soldier?

We know of no such persons.

AZARIAH

But surely you have met the little lame girl,
So like my Nellie?

You all remember Nellie?

(WAITS nod their heads)

She went up the path some time ago,

And just now, not quite five minutes since,

The soldier—not unlike my David—

Went whistling out to meet you.

Surely, surely you have seen them both,

There is but one path up the mountain side?

WAITS

No, no,

We have seen no one.

AMBROSE

You must have dreamed it, brother.

AZARIAH

No, do not say that;
No it was no dream.
The little girl was lame,
I gave her Nellie's crutch.
Go, follow the small crutch marks in the snow.
They are so tiny,
But they sink almost as deep in the white snow
As in a father's heart.

(Two or three WAITS go out)

(AZARIAH grasps AMBROSE by the arm)

I did *not* dream,
And you are sure that you passed no one?
Think, oh think what this would mean to me.
The little lame girl and the boy so like my
David.

AMBROSE

(Looking at him and much moved)

I understand,

I understand,

(Making the sign of the cross)

God has been with you on this holy night.

WAITS

(Returning)

There are no crutch marks in the snow,
And we have circled all about the house.

AZARIAH

No marks,

No marks?

Oh God, let it be true!

(He looks to the corner where the crutch stood.)

There is no crutch; it's gone.

See, see, the crutch is gone.

It was no dream.

David, Nellie,

Oh God be thanked,

This place is holy ground.

(Sinks on his knees. AMBROSE beckons the WAITS to the door and they tip-toe out, AMBROSE last, making the sign of the cross. As he closes the door the carolling bursts forth in a joyous song, "Come All Ye Faithful." Slowly AZARIAH rises from his knees, goes to the door, opens it, and stands listening as the carolling dies away in the distance.)

(CURTAIN)

WHY THE CHIMES RANG.

A play in one act by McFadden. Adapted from the story of the same name by Alden. Especially recommended as a Christmas play, it teaches the story of the Christ child, rather than the legend of Santa Claus. It may be adapted to the Christian denomination by slight changes of costume. It offers a rare opportunity for exquisite church music given in the barest room, against a background of Christmas or it may be presented with the most lavish equipment of professional theatre, yet both productions will thrill the touch the heart. It teaches the beauty of a charity and service as well as gold. Price, 35 cents.

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A very short play for little folks, by Ina Home. Time about 15 minutes but it can be lengthened to any duration by the further use of each child's specialty. The costumes are according to the actor represented and are easily made. The story is of a little girl on Christmas eve, in which she views the Christmas which she is to receive on the morrow. Santa Claus while filling the stocking tells a story of the little girl who he gives his presents. Then the Christmas pudding and how she was made. Then the pumpkin pie, the holly leaves, cream, crackers, candy, etc., enter and tell their story. It is easy to give and can be held in the class room, or a home. Price, 30 cents.

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A new and original entertainment for children by F. S. Isham and Edward Weitzel, with some new music. No special number required. Particularly adapted for Sunday-school entertainments. One of the best entertainments published. Price 30 cents.

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MOTHER GOOSE'S CHRISTMAS VISIT. An entirely new and original entertainment for children by Edith Thompson Langley. This very pleasing entertainment embraces most of the Mother Goose characters, and any number of children, boys and girls, young and old, can take part. Songs and specialties can be introduced and the action prolonged to any length of time desired. It introduces Santa Claus and the Christmas tree and all the favorite characters of the little ones. It is an admirable entertainment for the Christmas holidays, and is printed complete with music, suggestions for staging, costuming, etc. Plays about an hour. This entertainment has always been a great success wherever produced. Price, 30 cents.

THE GIFT. A symbolic play in one act by Marie A. Foley. The action passes in a simple room of a little house near Judea during the lifetime of Our Lord. The characters are two men, one woman and three children. The costumes—tunic draperies—make it easily possible to be played by an all female cast. Joel, a little lame boy, firmly believes the Galilean can cure him of his lameness if he will go and ask Him. In preparation the boy makes a wreath of white roses as a gift for the Galilean. Huldah, with whom Joel lives, a woman with neither heart nor imagination, ridicules the boy's faith, throws the wreath into the fire and frustrates the boy's going by leaving him in sole charge of her father, an aged and infirm man. A stranger, blind, also seeking the Galilean, to regain his sight, stops at the door for food and rest. The boy takes him in. Accidentally the stranger comes in contact with the charred wreath which Joel has dragged from the fire. The stranger hears about the wreath's purpose and offers to carry it to the Galilean. Joel explains its sorry plight. "The Galilean will understand," answers the stranger. "But it is black and ugly," exclaims the boy. "But not the heart that fashioned it," he is answered. The stranger then learns of the boy's desire to be cured and offers himself to remain there with the aged man while the boy goes to get his heart's desire. The boy accepts the stranger's great sacrifice (much to the disappointment of the old invalid) and leaves the house. However, in a few minutes the boy is back again crying out that he cannot go. "It is much worse being blind than being lame." The stranger is put upon the road by the boy to seek the Galilean. The boy watching him through the window sees the stranger meet with a Traveller, sees the giving of his burnt wreath to the Traveller, its transformation into beautiful crimson roses as it touches the Traveller's hands, then the return of the stranger no longer blind to the house. In his joy the boy leaps across the room to the door to find that his crutches have dropped to the floor and he has leaped across the room unaided—cured. The play ends with much joy for all three in the room while outside is heard the voice of the unbeliever, "Strange we missed Him; He must have passed this way." The stranger answers, "Yes, He passed this way." Price, 35 cents.

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